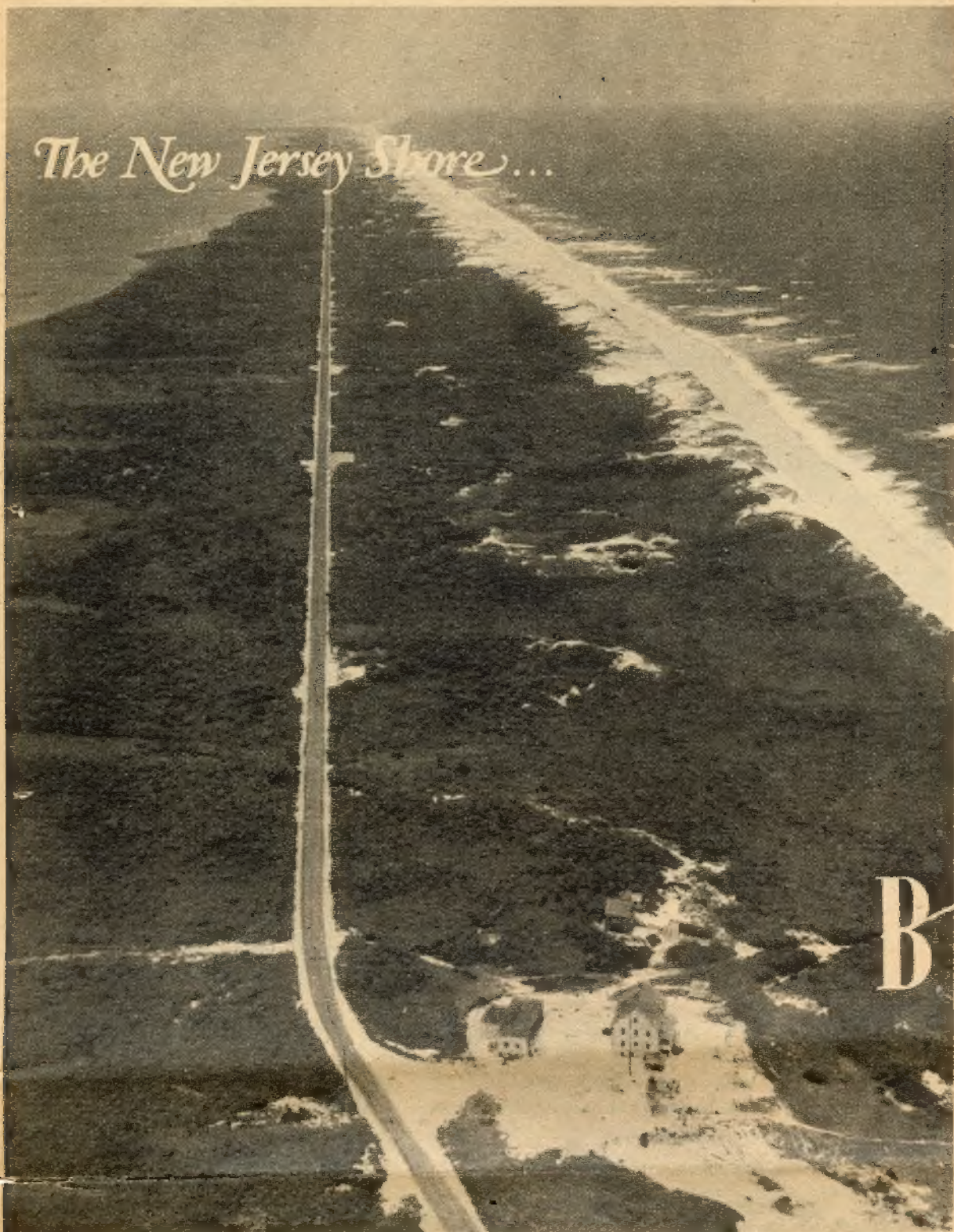




BARNEGAT PENINSULA

*'Squan' and Island Beach 'Halves' of 22-Mile
Strand Provide Study in Playground Contrasts*

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

Island Beach, now in blueprint stage as state's seashore park and nature preserve, as it appears from the air. View, looking north from point near Barnegat Inlet, takes in bay waters (left) and ocean.



Amusement and other concessions on boardwalk at Seaside Heights. Resort is linked to "mainland" west of Barnegat Bay by means of the Mathis Bridge.

WILD currents rolling out of the Atlantic Ocean slammed a wall of sand into Cranberry Inlet in 1812, closing off the finest Barnegat Bay passageway to the sea. That storm-tossed night Barnegat Peninsula was born and, strangely enough, in all the passing years neither man nor ocean has split asunder what God had brought together.

This IS strange, because the Atlantic is known to slice its way through sandy barrier beaches whenever and wherever it pleases. The ocean seldom leaves any off-shore sand bar alone for decades on end. This long slender shoestring of a peninsula is 22 miles long and but a half mile or so wide; the ocean could breach that thin strand overnight if the stormy mood struck it.

Planners failed grandiosely to bring back the inlet in 1821 and 1847, but the Atlantic hasn't cooperated once in 145 years. Nevertheless, Cranberry Inlet's old influence lingers on—even with no natural separation, Barnegat Peninsula is really two parts: Deserted Island Beach to the south and the string of resorts from Seaside Park north to Bay Head.

Island Beach, someday to be New Jersey's long-awaited seashore park, is no more island than Asbury Park,

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LEFT: Airview of Bay Head at northern end of peninsula. Manasquan Canal link of the Inland Waterway may be seen in center foreground.

although a bay-to-ocean snow fence keeps out curious taxpayers. No one save Coast Guardsmen and "squatters" (some far from penniless, by the way) has ever lived on the "island." Island Beach, despite that isolation, gets far more newspaper attention than Squan Beach, where summer crowds flock.

SQUAN BEACH? That takes you back—back before resorts came to the peninsula in the 1870s, back indeed to about 1750, when the surging sea cut through from the ocean to Flat Bay Sound (as upper Barnegat Bay was called). Natives simply and directly called the region north of the inlet "Squan Beach" and south of it "Island Beach." Across the bay, a new world of opportunity opened

Michael Ortley, who settled on the peninsula in 1818, proved the exception. Rallying fishermen and farmers, Ortley worked on and off for three years to create a new channel. Success of a pathetically limited nature came in 1821, when in the evening twilight Ortley and company watched the mingling of bay and ocean waters through their hard-dug inlet.

A CONTEMPORARY account reports:

"Mr. Ortley and his friends had quite a merry time celebrating their work." They went to bed to dream of square riggers once more maneuvering through Cranberry Inlet. They awoke to find the same old hangover: The running tide, instead of sweeping open the channel, raised a bulkhead

This is the fifth of a series of articles on the New Jersey Shore. Long Beach Island, an 18-mile strand extending from Barnegat Light to Beach Haven Inlet, will be considered in the next chapter.

for Toms River sea captains via that new doorway to ocean lanes.

Heavily laden square riggers sailed through Cranberry Inlet, named for the wild fruit sailors plucked from the inlet's banks to ward off scurvy in long weeks at sea. Whaleboaters and privateers skimmed in and out through the channel to ravage British shipping during the Revolution. Many a captured English merchantman was steered home to Toms River by triumphant privateers, some of whom sailed a very thin line between piracy and patriotism.

Sea captains needed Cranberry Inlet, in war and in peace. Consider, then, the consternation in 1812 when out of the skies came a storm to complete the job of filling the inlet. Consider how today's truckers would feel if the George Washington Bridge should disappear in the night; Toms River sea captains felt much the same. Most ex-Cranberry Inlet users did nothing more than bewail their fate—and then sailed 12 miles south to Barnegat Inlet.

of sand to close it. That kept the diggers still until 1847, when a new generation drank to a new channel completed on July 4. But, came the night, came the tides—and away went the inlet!

There is a peculiar footnote to this history. On Nov. 17, 1935, a northeast storm scoured a beautiful new inlet across Island Beach, between the old Cranberry Inlet and the existing Barnegat Inlet. This time, as a changing era would have it, human ingenuity worked not to keep open the 600-foot-wide channel but to close it. Baymen and boatsmen hoped the channel would deepen. Owners of Island Beach wanted it to close.

Guards stood by to thwart channel users said to be "rum runners." Once in the darkness the patrol came upon several boats backed up to the mud flats, their propellers swiftly turning in an attempt to churn out shoals and thus hasten the tidal flow. It made no difference; the following spring the opening closed.

But enough of lost inlets. Barne-



gat Peninsula is a single entity despite the fact that regulations and red tape (and lack of money) serve to keep Island Beach almost as isolated as Cranberry Inlet once did.

ISLAND BEACH possibly is as well known—in print—as virtually any Jersey Shore region except Atlantic City or Asbury Park. Its virtues as a botanical preserve and as a potential Jones Beach have been carefully exploited—in print, only. Somewhat overlooked is the fact that Island Beach is also a living history book; conditions on the state-owned stretch are much what they were along the coast two centuries ago.

More to the point, Island Beach is in appearance what all of Barnegat Peninsula was when vacationists discovered it after the Civil War.

An 1870 cartographer experienced but minor difficulty inking the 22-mile peninsula onto his map. He drew the thin bar, labeled the upper half "Squan Beach" and the lower half "Island Beach." If he wished to be precise, he printed in the name "Chadwick" for the fishing village about halfway down Squan Beach. No need to worry about railroads or roads—none existed.

Solitude and natural beauty mingled on the peninsula. A few fishermen

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lived at Chadwick and a few lonely men manned the lifesaving stations. It took the soul of a poet to enjoy the surroundings: The high dunes with the curving swales between, the beach plums, the gnarled old holly, the bay-berry and sedge, the cattails waving in the bay-side marshes.

TAKE such unmarred natural wonders, then see them as pioneers saw the peninsula from Bay Head to Barnegat Inlet in 1875. See low sandy hills capped with black moss, with bridges linking the hills to permit walkers to get about in times of high seas. See old wrecks littering the beaches to provide winter wood. See wagons with wide-rimmed wheels struggling over the sand to bring in provisions. See as the chief contact with the world the little sailboats flitting across to Toms River.

Such quaintness attracted a limited number of vacationists, of course. When H. C. Woolman and T. F. Rose published their "Atlas of the New Jersey Coast" in 1878 (just about the handsomest thing ever done on the New Jersey Shore), they mentioned Lavallette-by-the-Sea, Chadwick and Seaside Park. That was all. A decade of town-founding lay just ahead.

Albert Lavallette in the middle 1870s started the seaside resort he named for his father, Adm. Elie A. F. Lavallette of Baltimore, said to be the first commissioned admiral in the U.S. Navy. The admiral's son and his associates laid out square streets on the round dunes and waited for customers.

Down beach a spell, the Baptist Church found the place where they prayed they could emulate Ocean Grove's Methodist camp meeting ground. In 1876 the Baptists founded Seaside Park, a 300-acre camp ground as "a place for rest and ease at moderate expense and free from the blighting influences of immorality, drunkenness and Sabbath desecration." Those days thousands of sheep wandered the peninsula and the Baptists heard tales of sheep so weighted down with wind-whipped sand that they couldn't return home.

STILL, not as many sheep of the Biblical sort—lost or found—reached Seaside Park as the Baptists had hoped and the camp meeting expired. The foundations of a quiet residential community stood firm; even today Seaside Park remains relatively sedate.

Up where the long peninsula took its slim hold on the mainland, Bay Head and Mantoloking came into being as the 1870s faded. Mantoloking was first, begun in 1878 by Capt. John Arnold and his Sea-Shore Land and Improvement Co. Capt. Arnold knew whom he wanted to attract; he laid over the entire tract with imported inland soil to grow grass. That cost money; it also attracted money. The exclusive seed of Mantoloking was sown in the first load of topsoil dumped on the sand.

Princetonians established Bay Head in 1879, on land purchased from Capt.



Orderly rows of vacation retreats dot sands of Ocean Beach, shore "boomtown." Barnegat Bay is in background.

Elijah Chadwick, the only resident at Head of the Bay. Quickly the new little resort became a summer vacation place for many of Princeton University's faculty—a happenstance memorialized in some of Bay Head's streets since named for former university presidents and professors.

Bay Head's original stability rested on more than classical knowledge. From the time Benjamin Hance opened his small boat yard in 1878 until the present day, Bay Head has enjoyed a reputation for good boat-building. The best known name—Johnson—first appeared in 1891 when Morton Johnson opened his yard. Hubert, Morton's son, started making boats in 1912; his cabin cruisers since have been sold around the world.

BOATS loomed large in the insular life of the peninsula dwellers; only by boat could they get their food, their clothes, their mail and even some of their shelter from Toms River. Take for example the building of Seaside Park's Hiawatha Hotel. The promoters built the hotel in Philadelphia, took it apart and shipped it to Seaside Park—making the last few miles across shallow Barnegat Bay on broad barges.

So, they needed a railroad—but badly.

That required some doing. In 1880 the New York and Long Branch Railroad had not even the inclination to build across Manasquan River to Point Pleasant, much less down a hurricane-swept sand bar. In addition, the area seemed to hold more appeal for Philadelphians than up-staters or New Yorkers. A glance at the map tells why: The north and south latitudes of Philadelphia's city limits today almost exactly coincide with the latitudes of Barnegat Peninsula's two ends.

It took extraordinary vision for the Pennsylvania Railroad to bring rails to the barrier beach. First the Pennsylvania acquired an existing line from Camden to Pemberton, then extended its tracks to Barnegat Bay on the south side of Toms River. Ahead lay the toughest job of all—a trestle

across the bay, a mile and a quarter of open water. To this could be added another half-mile of sedgy marsh on the land side; this, too, had to be bridged.

NEARLY two miles of open water and shifty marshes had to be conquered. A savage winter in 1880 made the work doubly hard—the bay froze over so thickly that workmen had to chop through the ice before pilings could be driven into the bay bottom. Fortitude conquered all, and the first train rumbled over the frail trestle and up to Seaside Park in 1881. Soon after rails reached all the way north to join the New York and Long Branch.

Here is something to ponder: Island Beach probably is isolated today chiefly because the railroad turned north only in 1881. True, that's where Seaside Park and Lavallette-by-the-Sea lay—that region logically beckoned the first trains. Nevertheless, railroad pioneers who dared to bridge a mile and a quarter of bay and a half-mile of uncertain sedgeland should have been expected to penetrate the southward dunes. But the railroad never went south; as Squan Beach expanded, Island Beach began its deep sleep.

Not that the railroad transformed Squan Beach into a heavily populated suburb of Philadelphia. The moneyed influences at Bay Head and Mantoloking discouraged that on the north, and the sedateness of Seaside Park on the south convinced fun-bent excursionists that Atlantic City offered greater opportunity for gaiety.

THE peninsula's yachtsmen learned the virtues of Barnegat Bay. Henry J. West of Gloucester, N.J., a bay front cottager in Seaside Park, in the 1880s started a series of races for the locally-famed sneak box sailboats. The men who manned the Life Saving Stations entered eagerly, undoubtedly drawn as much by large cash prizes as by racing interest.

Those sneak box races spawned the Seaside Park Yacht Club in 1899, and rivalry among sailboaters became in-

tense on Barnegat Bay, with clubs from Bay Head, Island Heights, Toms River, Mantoloking and Lavallette competing with Seaside Park for bay supremacy. In 1926 an International Series for Class E sloops started, with the best of Barnegat Bay's skippers matching sails against the Royal St. Lawrence Yacht Club of Montreal. That rivalry continued until 1933, alternating between the Seaside Park course and the Maple Leaf course in Montreal.

Yacht racing just about summed up the height of Barnegat Peninsula excitement at the turn of the century. Coast chronicler William Nelson in 1902 allocated one sketchy paragraph in two fat volumes to the peninsula, "upon which have been built numerous pleasant little villages." Bay Head? "Splendid piscatorial sport is afforded," said Mr. Nelson. Seaside Park? "The nearest seaside resort to Philadelphia from which it derives a large and constant throng of visitors in season," summed up Mr. Nelson. The others? Mr. Nelson mentioned them not at all.

CERTAINLY Bay Head and Mantoloking attracted new people, or at least second generations of old families. They came between 1890 and 1915 to build the comfortable two and three-story villas fronting the ocean. Those old houses still stand, conservatively similar in appearance, with their old shingles either darkened or silvered by ever-moving decades.

There is nothing quite like the Bay Head-Mantoloking atmosphere anywhere else on the New Jersey Shore. Houses at Deal and Elberon or Margate may be bigger and brighter and more costly, but the Bay Head-Mantoloking homes, set comfortably in reasonably well-preserved dunes, are like familiar seaside mansions seen in old Harper's Magazine etchings. There is unshowy evidence of wealth, of conservatism—of the expensive "natural" look, the "Ivy League" look, so to speak.

The automobile democratized Barnegat Peninsula. In 1909 the first

road started southward from Point Pleasant, by 1911 the thin highway reached Seaside Park. Two years later a long wooden bridge carried automobile traffic across Barnegat Bay from Toms River to the uncertain sandy roads on the mainland. A new day dawned for the dunes.

Five brothers from Philadelphia—the Cummings boys—arose to greet that dawn, choosing to develop the exact spot where Cranberry Inlet ceased to flow a century before. Along with the Manhasset Realty Co., the Cummings developed Seaside Heights, converting acres of moss-covered dunes into building lots just in time to take advantage of the new roads and the bridge.

Seaside Heights eventually outstripped all its peninsular neighbors in size, in large measure because the automobile bridge conveniently landed Quaker City motorists in town before they had a chance to look elsewhere. Seaside Heights also proved the value of a commercial boardwalk, frowned on in most other Bay Head-to-Seaside Park towns.

The greatest Barnegat Peninsula development of all never got off the drawing board, however. An announcement in 1926 said that buyers for Henry Phipps, partner of Andrew Carnegie in Pittsburgh steel ventures, had purchased everything from Seaside Park to Barnegat Inlet. The plan: To construct "a high-class private development on Island Beach."

NEWSPAPERS claimed the purchase to be the largest in many years along the Atlantic coast. The huge tract in colonial days belonged to Lord Stirling and through passing time picked up some clouded land titles.

One of the owners of property on Island Beach, for example, was Columbia University. No one even bothered to chase the squatters who threw up shacks after 1900, partially because no one knew exactly who owned what. Phipps' lawyers finally gained the last parcel in 1926, al-

though the settlers paid the new owners no more mind (or rent) than they had paid the old.

Speculation ran rife. Island Beach would be the "largest development ever undertaken on the Atlantic coast." A new highway would run southward to Barnegat Inlet. The Pennsylvania Railroad planned to nose its tracks southward after all these years. Rolls of blueprints showed fine homes, yacht clubs, tennis courts and a golf club, exactly right to appeal to the new millionaires and semi-millionaires aborning on Wall Street.

The 1929 business crash erased the swank Island Beach development, the fine homes, the yacht clubs and, of course, most of the millionaires who would settle there. Then in 1930 the 90-year-old Mr. Phipps died and as depression years rolled on the few settlers (ranging a wide economic scale from rich to poor) called Island Beach theirs, more or less exclusively.

ON and off for 30 years the state talked of buying Island Beach, without doing anything concrete until 1952—when \$2,750,000 snatched Island Beach intact out of the grasp of a real estate company planning something in the line of what the Phipps estate dreamed of in 1926. Thus, one of these decades Island Beach will be a state park; the blueprints can be shown to anyone.

Island Beach is a familiar story, and the pile of blueprints calling for a joint "Jones Beach" and nature preserve are about as big (and as inactive) as those of the 1926 developers. The state park looks wonderful—on paper—but it awaits funds.

The dunes and trees and flowers and birds are all that everyone who knows Island Beach claims them to be. Meanwhile, the squatters live on undisturbed, as they have done for 40 years. Anyone else who wishes can get a year-around family permit for \$18 annually (which no longer allows throwing up a shack).

If a strip of land can be measured

in terms of people who enjoy it, then the time from World War II—indeed, from 1950—to the present must be considered the most compelling in all the long existence of Barnegat Peninsula.

AS a point of contrast, a 1939 impression of the peninsula showed little development outside of Bay Head, Mantoloking, Lavallette, Seaside Heights and Seaside Park. Bay Head and Mantoloking of course hadn't changed much since 1910 (and aren't likely to change much in the foreseeable future, as far as that goes). Lavallette, Seaside Heights and Seaside Park enjoyed only modest popularity in the days just before Pearl Harbor.

Informality ruled the peninsula until World War II. Trailers, tents and shacks in varying degrees of repute (or disrepute) could be found in many areas. Broad areas of undeveloped seaside land rolled up one dune and down another. Perhaps the area seemed too far out of the way for northern New Jersey, perhaps the rickety old wooden bridge discouraged Pennsylvanians. At any rate, the peninsula couldn't have been called a beehive of activity.

That contrast makes the happenings since 1950 stand out in sharp perspective. The Thomas A. Mathis Bridge, completed to replace the old span to Seaside Heights, coincided with the incredible demand for small shore homes that began to swell in about 1950.

Everywhere from Mantoloking south to Seaside Park new cottages have replaced the dunes and the bayberry—and even Bay Head and Mantoloking have, in a controlled way, each year gained some few new residents.

When it comes to discussing change, Exhibit A on Barnegat Peninsula is Ocean Beach. The only thing comparable is the sudden rise of small homes on lagoons on the land side of Barnegat Bay. Ocean Beach almost beggars description. Less than a

decade ago there was nothing where the sprawling seaside resort now lies. Today, on lots just big enough to hold a small house, hundreds of vacation retreats dot the sand. Ocean Beach is of sufficient economic vitality to merit a branch bank.

Ocean Beach's streets could be the closest together anywhere in the state—or just anywhere. Streets roll seaward and bayward from Rt. 37, so many of them that the developers would seem likely to run out of street names. Street follows street—Penguin, Amberjack, Albacore, Marlin, Pelican, Kingfisher, Surf, Spray, Channel, Beach, Bay, Barnegat, and so on and on. Each, of course, is an "east" street and a "west" street, going on the one hand to the ocean and on the other to the bay.

OUT on the bay side of Barnegat Peninsula, the popular lagoons are everywhere, visible attestment to the fact that boating is just as popular today as it was when the yacht clubs began to exploit the bay. Elsewhere, the old established resorts are gaining new homes on the fringes of their built-up blocks.

Seaside Heights, which entered a period of second growth in 1939 and a third period after the war, is a busy boardwalk town. As many as 40,000 people pour over the Mathis Bridge on a summer weekend to visit the Heights and its amusements. In 1955 a one million dollar fire wiped out four blocks of boardwalk, but the borough and private operators calmly replaced it. Seaside Heights is prospering; boardwalks aren't rebuilt in bad times.

Barnegat Peninsula is in its rapid growth an astonishing manifestation of a nation on wheels and with money in its pockets. In this respect it also offers the sharp differentiation between the days when only the rich went to the shore via the railroads and these days when anyone with an automobile and the courage to sign a mortgage can be a shore home owner.

Cranberry Inlet? Who needs an inlet?



Bathers at Seaside Heights and (right) "lagoon dwellers" at Normandy Beach.